

COMBATTING YOUTH OFFENDING

Labour's approach to youth crime is failing, with one business being ram-raided every 15 hours this year. National will confront the growing youth crime wave by ensuring there are real consequences for serious repeat offenders, and support to help them turn their lives around.

Policy highlights

- A Young Serious Offender (YSO) category to increase consequences for repeat offenders.
- Young Offender Military Academies where YSOs can be sent for up to 12 months for intensive rehabilitation.
- Greater powers for Police to tackle the criminal gangs recruiting young people into a life of crime.
- Investment in community organisations to work with YSOs and support their families.

Why we need a new approach

New Zealand is experiencing an unprecedented wave of youth offending, with ram-raids up 500 percent since 2018.

New Zealand's youth justice system works well for the majority of young offenders; 80 percent of young first-time offenders who interact with the youth justice system are dealt with quickly and set back on the right path.¹

However, the system is failing to adequately deal with the hardcore repeat young offenders who Police say are responsible for the majority of ram-raids. Police often know who these young people are, but a lack of real consequences means they are almost powerless to stop them.

National has a plan to crack down on serious repeat youth offenders like ram-raiders to turn their lives around and to protect the public.

1. Young Serious Offender (YSO)

National will ensure the most serious repeat youth offenders aged 10 to 17 face real consequences by establishing a new Young Serious Offender category. The YSO category will provide greater powers across government agencies to detain offenders, impose stronger sentences, increase monitoring, and check offenders are complying with mandated rehabilitation activities or community service requirements.

To be classified as a YSO, an offender must have committed two or more serious offences (such as a ram-raid, other aggravated burglary, serious assault, or aggravated robbery). Judges will be required to take account of Police recommendations for classification and sentencing.

A YSO can face a range of consequences such as being sent to a Youth Offender Military Academy, electronic monitoring, or being subject to an intensive supervision order with a community provider. Only YSOs aged 15 or above will be eligible to be sent to an Academy.

A YSO classification will last for two years. If there is no further offending while classified as a YSO, the classification will be removed.

¹Judge Andrew Becroft "Playing to Win - Youth Offenders Out of Court (And Sometimes In): Restorative Practices in the New Zealand Youth Justice System".

2. Young Offender Military Academies

Young people classified as YSOs who are aged 15 to 17 can be ordered by a Youth Court Judge to attend a Young Offender Military Academy for up to 12 months. The Academies will provide discipline, mentoring and intensive rehabilitation to make a decisive intervention in these young offenders' lives.

The Academies will be run by the Ministry of Justice, in partnership with the Defence Force and other government agencies, with support from community organisations or iwi with a track record of delivering programmes that reduce youth reoffending.

This approach will see young repeat offenders removed from the negative environment that is driving their offending. The Academies will act as a circuit breaker so these young people can receive intensive rehabilitation in a monitored facility. While in the Academy, YSOs will receive schooling, counselling, drug and alcohol treatment, mentoring, and cultural support.

Parents or guardians will be assigned a case worker through either Whānau Ora, the Ministry of Social Development, or a community provider to implement a plan to reintegrate the YSO once they complete their time at an Academy.

3. Backing Police, Tackling Gangs

Some serious youth offending is being driven by gangs. Young people are "stealing to order" on behalf of gangs, and young offenders are committing ram-raids as a form of gang initiation.

Gangs are actively recruiting young people to join their ranks; gang membership has increased by more than 50 percent in the last five years. National will give Police the tools they need to tackle gangs and stop them contributing to the youth crime wave.

National's Backing Police, Tackling Gangs policy, announced earlier in the year, will give Police four new powers:

- Banning gang patches and insignia in public.
- Stopping gang members gathering in public.
- Stopping gang offenders associating with each other.
- Creating new search powers so Police can take guns off gangs.

4. Empowering community groups

National will use community organisations and other non-government agencies like iwi to break the cycle of offending. Some YSOs will be ordered to undergo intensive supervision by community-based organisations. This will mean they face consequences for their actions and receive tools to turn their lives around, while remaining connected to their families.

National will help prevent young offenders from re-offending by:

- Using community organisations to run ongoing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for Young Serious Offenders and their families.
- Assigning each young offender who has completed their time at a Young Offender Military Academy to a community provider to provide intensive support to help their reintegration back into the community.

National will use a social investment approach to target effective support towards young people at risk of serious offending, and by investing in family and community-based interventions that data and evidence show will be most effective in preventing offending.

Costing

	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4
Young Offender Military Academy places per year	60	60	60	60
Young Offender Military Academy cost (new funding)	\$15m	\$15m	\$15m	\$15m
Community Provider Funding (reprioritised from baselines)	\$10m	\$10m	\$10m	\$10m
Total Cost	\$25m	\$25m	\$25m	\$25m